

LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

FULL, UNCUT CONVERSATION — INSIDE THE MAGA MOVEMENT: WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

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NARRATOR: While our weekly shows are edited to time for broadcast on public TV and community radio, we offer to our supporting members and podcast subscribers the full, uncut conversation. The following is from our episode “Inside the MAGA Movement: What Happens Now?” with guest Michael Premo, a journalist and filmmaker who produced and directed the gripping documentary “Homegrown”. The film follows three members of the Proud Boys in the lead up to the January 6th insurrection. These audio exclusives are made possible thanks to our member supporters.

LAURA FLANDERS: That was a clip from "[Homegrown](#)," a stunning new documentary, by [Michael Premo](#) and [Rachel Falcone](#), about the violence that helped bring Donald Trump back to power. Made on the down-low with extraordinary access, "Homegrown" follows three men involved in the extremist group, the Proud Boys, as they participate in protests, rallies, and ultimately paramilitary action before and after the November 2020 election. An intimate record of the feelings and facts that push some to political violence, the film also casts light on the changing dynamics and demographics within today's far-Right movement. "Homegrown" is compelling, concerning, and perfectly timed. On January 6, 2021, Premo was there at the Capitol following one of his subjects, Christopher Quaglin, then a radicalized father-to-be, as he stormed the building and assaulted officers, leading to Quaglin's arrest and sentencing to a 12-year prison term. Today, Quaglin is one of the over 1,500 people charged and 900 convicted in relation to their acts that day. He's also one of the same 1,500 pardoned by Donald Trump when he took office a second time. What are we to make of all this? Well, "Homegrown" makes us think about all of it, our laws, our culture, our neighbors, and ourselves. Michael Premo's work spans film, radio, theater, installation, and photography. With his frequent collaborator, Rachel Falcone, he co-directed the participatory documentary "Sandy Storyline," among others. "Homegrown" premiered at the Venice Film Festival in the summer of 2024. It's out now from [Storyline Media](#). Welcome to "Laura Flanders & Friends," Michael. I am very glad to see you. When did you decide that this was the story you wanted to tell, and how did you get the access that you did?

MICHAEL PREMO: Well, thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure to be in conversation. You know, I've been telling you little bits about this film over the years, so I'm excited to finally, you know, share it with you in the world. So thank you very much. Rachel and I started filming this in 2018, and it was really at that moment where we were trying to better understand why people felt it was necessary to use violence to achieve what it is that they felt

they needed to achieve. So we really set out to try to better understand why people, sort of somewhat across the political spectrum, were fighting for America. Like, what does that mean to fight for America? Who are you fighting? What are you fighting for? And I think that honest curiosity was really a credit to how we ended up getting the access that we did. I think fundamentally I found many people who, you know, share a perspective that I share, which is that, you know, we live in a system where the economic and political system is rigged in favor of corporations and the billionaires at the expense of working-class and middle-class people. And that sort of central critique or frustration sort of seemed to run through all the people that we met.

LAURA FLANDERS: Now, you say you set out to look across the political spectrum, but you end up with three Proud Boys. Can you talk about them as individuals, how you settled on them? And what happened to that idea that you would be talking to people of a variety of political ideologies?

MICHAEL PREMO: While we were in production, we were talking to people sort of who are on the Left, who are on the Right. And the more we thought about this film, it became there was too many ideas for one film. And the energy, and the excitement, and the proximity to power that the conservative movement was exhibiting made that angle particularly provocative. So we ended up sort of following that threat.

LAURA FLANDERS: Well, follow you do. You seem to be, like, almost on the back of Christopher Quaglin as he's there at the Capitol on January 6th. I don't think you ever imagined that your work would take you there. I'm assuming. But one of the points your film makes so well is that what exploded on that day had roots far earlier. Is there a moment where you could see that possibly something like January 6th was on the cards?

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah. I mean, why we ended up with the participants that we did was because we really saw this sort of level of energy and excitement bubbling in the conservative movement, and I'm very familiar with social movements. I've been around many different types of social movements, and there was just this energy call listed in a particular way, and we wanted to figure out how we could be as close to the center of that energy as possible to really better understand why people were doing what they were doing. And, so, of course, we could have never imagined where it would take us, but we knew we were headed to something explosive. And that seemed really apparent kind of well before the election. Like, in the summer of the election, the summer before the election, it became very clear that there was a level of alignment and organization across different tendencies of the conservative movement that were finding a level of, finding the kind of a rhythm of working together, so to speak, in a way that pretended that something big was gonna happen.

LAURA FLANDERS: Was there anything you learned about that day, January 6th itself?

MICHAEL PREMO: I mean, I think, what we learned is that it was, I think, overall, what we learned is that the movement is much more diverse and dynamic than we sort of went in thinking. We did not expect to find people across a sort of racial and demographic spectrum like we did. I think the image, there are a couple images, I think, that are sort of, predominate around January 6th, and one of them is sort of people just sort of waltzing into the Capitol and wandering around the rotunda. And then there's sort of images of just, you know, the sort of kind of the violence that was on the west side of the Capitol, which is where we were, for most of the day. But I think people don't fully appreciate how this event was planned in public. You know, like, the drum was beating to storm the Capitol since around Christmas. And we really tried to show in the film there was kind of two turning points in the fall with the "Million MAGA March" in November and the sort of "Stop the Steal" rally in December, that were really kind of two turning points that really showed how people were getting increasingly frustrated with what they believed was a stolen election. And as they saw their sort of legal avenues for recourse dwindling, were becoming more aggravated and more aggravated. And so, in December, it seemed inevitable that there was going to be a large amount of violence.

LAURA FLANDERS: It's important to remind people, we're talking about Election 2020. And we are now four years on and entering a second Trump term. Are the concerns you raise, that you've just mentioned, allayed now? Do you feel like these folks that you followed are like, "Okay, our guy's in power, we can go home"?

MICHAEL PREMO: No, I think what we're going to see is an escalation of the potential for violence. And it may not be this year. It may not be next year. It may take, you know, a few years to see sort of what it looks like. But I think what we're going to see is from across the movement, you see folks learning the lesson of the first four, the first term of Donald Trump, where there were many people in the movement that didn't feel like they were as effective as they should have been or could have been. You know, I think Project 2025 is a great example of the sort of broader consensus among the conservative movement around what to do once they regained power. And that is reflected, I think, up and down the streams of participation in the movement where people are like, no. Now is our moment, and people feel increasingly emboldened, in a way that I think is somewhat similar of 2016, but there's a different sense of urgency around now.

LAURA FLANDERS: We're gonna come back to this. But let's, while we have you, talk a bit about the spectrum of this movement as you described it, the diversity, in fact. I'm talking racial, gender. You focus on three men, Thad, Chris, and Randy, but they're women in the picture too. And you go across the country. We're talking urban, eastern, southern, western, places you'd expect, places you wouldn't expect. One of the most surprising sections of the film is the part that shows a rally, supposedly Patriots Against Racism, that is being organized by some of the

participants in your film in Utah, in Salt Lake City. Do you wanna set this up? It's the shot where the 2 of them are in the car in a kind of caravan of vehicles heading to the Capitol?

MICHAEL PREMO: Well, as many people remember, there was a sort of a phenomenon that happened, partly as a result of the pandemic, where there was all these car caravans and and rallies that were taking place, and it, in sort of in place of big public rallies in a in a in a crowded space. People are gathering these in these large car caravans, and there was also boat caravans. And so, this is a car caravan called the Trump train in Salt Lake City, Utah. And we see, one of the protagonists in our film, Thad Cisneros, who is a Latino man from South Texas who was living in Salt Lake City at the time, and he is a Proud Boy. And he is somebody who had been racially profiled by the police on several occasions. And it was his opinion that the problem with police was not a systemic problem, but it was a case of bad apples. But regardless, he is somebody who was interested in or is still interested in police reform. He thought that the system had to be addressed in some way to address these bad apples. And so he forged this highly, completely unlikely alliance with this woman named Jacarri Kelley, who is a Black Lives Matter activist. And he was like, "Look, maybe we can sort of reach across the aisle," so to speak, and talk to people who, you know, on the surface, maybe were diametrically opposed. So him and Jacarri kind of struck up this unlikely relationship, which we see in the film.

NARRATOR: Hi, lovely listeners. Laura Flanders & Friends is, as we say, the place where the people who say it can't be done take a back seat to the people who are doing it. Our guests are doing it. Now we just want to thank you, our member supporters, for doing your part. All of you who have yet to become members, please do it. Join our community today by making a one time donation or make it monthly at lauraflanders.org/donate. Thank you. And a reminder to hit that subscribe button wherever you get your podcasts, and thank you. Now back to our full uncut conversation.

LAURA FLANDERS: It's not all kumbaya, as even this clip reveals. You've talked about that alliance as unlikely. What's happened to it?

MICHAEL PREMO: So it was somewhat short-lived. Thad's attempt to try to work with Black Lives Matter activists was met with a backlash from other activists in the Proud Boys who were very critical of him trying to work with Black Lives Matter. Some people liked the idea, some people were like, "No, you can't work with them. They think we're all white supremacists, they'll never understand anything else." And as a result, their partnership was very short-lived.

LAURA FLANDERS: Is the far Right white supremacist?

MICHAEL PREMO: So I think that is one of the things that we try to complicate in the film. Because we show so many people of color who would not identify as white supremacists, who, they themselves, say that they're not racist. Even, you know, one of the Proud Boys in our film, Randy Ireland, who is a white man who lives in Brooklyn, New York, you know, in my experience with him, is someone who is not a racist. You know, and I think it sort of complicates this narrative. And I saw Randy and I saw Thad fighting with other activists in the movement around racism or around white supremacy. And often the flack that they caught was, "Hey, you're giving in to the sort of woke Left that's trying to censor and trying to, you know, cancel people. We're conservatives, we don't cancel people. We accept all views. It's freedom of speech. People can say what they're gonna say." And, you know, Randy would retort with, "No, we need to get rid of the white supremacists. We need to get rid of the racists. That's not what democracy, that's not what America is about." And this tension was present and it was palpable, and it was a level of debate, or it was a volume of the debate, that I didn't expect to find.

LAURA FLANDERS: What you do cover though, and portray so brilliantly, is maybe not white supremacist the people, but white supremacy the structure. And I'm thinking particularly of the scene where another one of the caravans, one that Chris is participating in, is heading down the highway in Long Island at relatively high speed, and they're joking about how they're never going to get pulled over by police. What are you wanting your audience to think about that moment?

MICHAEL PREMO: So what we want to see, why we made this film in the way that we made it, and what I mean by that is this is an observational film, there's no sit-down interviews.

LAURA FLANDERS: No, we feel like we are right there with you.

MICHAEL PREMO: And we wanted you to be up close and personal to see the gulf, and the juxtapositions, and the tensions, and contradictions between what they say and what they do, and how their actions reverberate in the world in very different ways based on race and class. And so we wanted to be clear to see how people move through the world, and how they act very differently. I think we see this in that Trump train that you're referencing, and we also see this on January 6. If there was a very different type of movement that looked in a very different way, the response from law enforcement would've been absolutely different, and, as you know, I have no compunction about that at all. And so we want to make these juxtapositions very clear and really complicate, have a way in for people who sort of don't quite understand how their actions may support systems of white supremacy, and what the gulf between what you say is and what you do is, if that makes sense.

LAURA FLANDERS: Talking about our awareness as a society now, the Department of Homeland Security, the Justice Department, watchdog groups, often identify white supremacists, right-wing extremists, violent extremists, however you choose to define them, as a potential threat. What do you make of what is actually being done, and what it perhaps might look like effectively to police extremist, violent groups like the Proud Boys?

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah, the policing question is really complicated, because you have even people in the sort of mainstream culture, the conservative mainstream culture who have very particular ideas around who America is for and who America represents, and these are people in positions of power. And so I think it's very complicated to try to police ideas, but I think we have to, I think what the obstacle is, is often we flatten people into these two-dimensional ideas of who we think they are or what we think they are, and that prevents us from having any sort of conversation. And I think people across the political spectrum do this. Like, stereotypes are a very effective way to sort of de-legitimize somebody that you disagree with fundamentally. But those stereotypes create an obstacle to being able to sort of police these ideas and root out pernicious sort of things that are undermining even the potential for democracy to be a functioning system. And so I think that we need to be able to engage in conversations with people we disagree with in more functional ways, and that's one way at getting out and rooting out some of these pernicious ideas.

LAURA FLANDERS: Before we get to us and our interpersonal though, there's still the institutional. The FBI seems to have no problem profiling, and pursuing, and often prosecuting terrorists of the Left, people like eco-terrorists, we even have a word for it, but less easy it seems on the other side.

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah, that's right. I was just listening to the congressional hearing for the potential next attorney general, and one of the questions that was posed to her was around completely ignoring recommendations from the research by the Southern Poverty Law Center, because this, you know, Republican senator was labeling them as a sort of anti-Christian organization. So I think we have some structural work to do to be able to rid our institutions of these ideas.

LAURA FLANDERS: I talk about it just because on day one of 2025, the FBI found what it says is its largest arms cash in somebody's backroom in Virginia. I mean, these issues are not going away. Coming back to us though, which is where you bring us, Michael, into this discussion, all of us, I did want to hear more about where you see places for work to be done, and you've alluded to it. But for one thing, one question I have is where do you see the fissures inside the far right and even inside the individuals themselves? We saw a lot of tension between, you know, the father who's trying to be a great dad, but that being a great dad has ended him up with 12 years in prison. Complex feelings about family and masculinity come up throughout this. So where do

you see the fissures within the movement? And then where do you see possible points of connection? You've mentioned 1, and I think your guy Thad, you know, was radicalized by Michael Moore. You know? So that's one point of connection right there.

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah. I mean, I think one of the big ones is race, as I mentioned. I think that the sort of tensions around, race and, how the system the you know, these institutions support systems of privilege is something that, like, I think there are in there are possible inroads. It's hard to get through the noise and the backlash around DEI and, you know, woke, and all these sort of buzzwords that have become sort of buzzwords to the Right. But I feel like if we can use different language, there's opportunities for penetration and deeper understanding around race and how privilege affects society. I think another point is around the crisis of masculinity. I think we don't have, and by we, I mean men, in particular cisgendered men, there's a lack of space within our society to express vulnerability and talk constructively around what does it mean to be a man in this current age. I think often these conversations are had through finger pointing, and shaming, and calling people out rather than calling people in. And so I think that's also that's also a point of intervention where it's possible to sort of have these questions around what does it mean to be a man in this modern area? What does that mean? What does strength actually look like? And I think that's something that is not talked about enough in a constructive way. So, you know, I I think that's that's that's a big one for sure.

LAURA FLANDERS: One of the others that struck me is it would probably help for us to have fewer wars. A lot of your folks are veterans.

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah, and, you know, there's Kathleen Belew and some of these writers who have well documented how every American conflict abroad is followed by sort of an explosion of sort of far-Right militarized activity at home. And, you know, what we're experiencing is very much a result of these, you know, 20 years of this, quote, unquote, "forever wars" where people, you know, signed up for God and country, and, you know, maybe perhaps, you know, earnest reasons to try to, you know, be involved in something, and many people join the military just to have a way out of their community, just to get a job, just to, you know, get an education. And all of these sort of complicated reasons for that involvement are not necessarily talked about in our broader society. People are sort of lumped in and grouped into these stereotypes. And, as a result, when they re-enter society, there isn't the support needed to be able to help folks reacclimate, refocus, and process the sort of trauma of those experiences in a way that can make them sort of productive to a pluralistic democracy that we're hoping to build. So I think that also, like, ties into the sort of alienation of the modern individual, man and woman, where we're just increasingly isolated from each other and just sort of, like, wrap behind screens. And people are looking for identity, people are looking for community, and people are looking for purpose. And particularly white people who might not necessarily feel, maybe unless you're like, you know, Irish or maybe you're Italian, you have a Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford

Coppola movies to, like, kind of, you know, help sort of create cultural anchors for your identity. Like, you know, people are struggling to sort of find, not be alienated in society and really connect with the strong identity, and we don't have sort of the language in our current culture for how we help people do that.

LAURA FLANDERS: It did occur to me as a woman watching some of these stories that possibly if we could have figured out how to connect to some of the increasingly disgruntled wives and mothers and and and female partners of these guys and given them a little bit more help to stand, and work with their men, that might have been another fruitful avenue.

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah. I think that's absolutely right. I mean, I think I mean, you know, this sort of world is powered by the unseen labor of women. And, you know, with the conservative movement, it's not it's not any different. But, again, we don't have the sort of spaces in our societies to really talk critically in a way that is free of judgment and shame.

LAURA FLANDERS: Well, that's what your film does so beautifully. And so I have some obvious questions, like, what did the people in the film think of the film, if they've seen it? And then it's been touring around the country at festivals, for about half a year, six months or so. What's been happening at those screenings, and what's the future of the film itself as far as you know?

MICHAEL PREMO: So, you know, some of the people who have seen the film, feel like they've been, they're represented accurately. They may not sort of agree with everything that was sort of shown in the film, but they feel like it's an accurate representation, at least those who are not in jail and have been able to see the film. And we were very lucky to premiere at the Venice Film Festival. And as a result, we've gotten really positive press, and we've been touring the festivals around the world as you mentioned. And we have had broadcast, very special, broadcast to coincide with the presidential transition in Spain and Germany. And it's interesting.

LAURA FLANDERS: What about the US?

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah. But not in the US yet. Some of our strongest screenings have been in Germany. There's been a lot of conversation and sort of self awareness around threats to democracy and Germany in a particular kind of way, and they've really responded to the film. But we've hit a kind of, hit up against this sort of malaise of corporate America and the United States, which is, doing what I what I've been calling, they seem like they're counter programming the apocalypse, with sort of light fare and things that don't sort of challenge the way we think and that what we understand. And we're sort of in this era of confirmation cinema when it comes to documentary where a lot of these programmers and these sort of corporate media want documentaries that confirm what we already know, that don't challenge or nuance our

understanding of the world around us. So we're sort of working through that, but we're hoping that a courageous broadcaster might step to the plate, particularly as pardons come down for these people who participated in January 6th. And, hopefully, there's a broadcaster out there who does not wanna participate in the rewriting of history.

LAURA FLANDERS: As Donald Trump takes office for his second term, if these pardons come through, what do you make of the culture we're creating around culpability, liability, accountability, impunity? Trump, of course, being the first felon now to sit in the White House, but having been sentenced to no time?

MICHAEL PREMO: Well, I think, one of the biggest things that it'll do is sort of reinforce this culture, this lack of accountability culture in which we exist, where people can, you know, commit acts of violence with impunity and without any sort of accountability. And that's, you know, kind of scary, because I think what it pretends is, you know, with the potential for an escalation of violence. We're in an era now where one political party, primarily the Republican party, no longer sees the Democrats as a legitimate partner in governance. And when one political party no longer sees the other party as a legitimate partner in governance, it increases the potential for sectarian violence. And we've seen this in other countries around the world over the last, you know, two, three decades. And I think that's the era that we're entering now that'll really be signaled by these pardons, because that's sending the message that January 6 was peaceful, and January 6 was sort of an inconsequential protest, just like any other "protest," quote, unquote. And I think, you know, there needs to be accountability for some of these people, particularly, people who committed acts of violence against law enforcement.

LAURA FLANDERS: So that goes back to seeing each other. I mean, if you have one party refusing to see the other as a legitimate party, we also have a whole lot of people refusing to see people of the alternative party, as other people.

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah. You said at the beginning that you recognize that kind of adrenaline rush, that you were seeing on the right from your own experiences on the left. So, you know, for lack of a better word. And I recognize it too. Going back to protests for fair globalization of trade, to protests outside the Seattle meetings of the World Trade Organization, to the Black Lives Matter protest. I'm not talking about the violence, but that sense of it could go there. It wouldn't take much. What did you learn about yourself in this process? And are there things now that you'll notice perhaps, in your own self? I know I'll be thinking about that for a while.

MICHAEL PREMO: Oh, that's a really great question. You know, I mean, I think it really did, you know, I've always sort of, like, wrestled with this eternal debate between violence and nonviolence and how we can make meaningful change in our democracy. And it, you know, really challenges my understanding of nonviolence, and what that looks like and what that

means. And I, you know, I think that, it's deepened my commitment to that idea, but really challenged my understanding of how we get there in a way that's productive, to fostering a pluralistic democracy in which everyone can thrive. So how do we get there? I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I mean, I think the big things I'm really interested in is, like, how we break through this alienation. How we just look at people as people and not look at people as ideas. And we can sit down on a table and have conversations and camaraderie in a way and still disagree. You know, I think, there's that quote, like, how do you disagree without being disagreeable? I think that's, you know, there's space to it and may kinda feel touchy feely, but I really think there's there's there's a currency there and our, you know, complete lack of dialogue and conversation with people that we disagree with. And I think now in the social media era, people are so firmly planted their flags and particular ideas, less so out of an interest for those ideas and more so as an expression and a performance of a perceived identity. And I think we, to get past that, we just have to sit down and sort of engage in conversation.

LAURA FLANDERS: Has Jacarri, the Black Lives Matter activist who we talked about in Utah, given up on this kind of work?

MICHAEL PREMO: Last time I talked to her, she had sort of been exhausted by activism, understandably so, working with her comrades on the left as well as trying to work across the right. She's just trying to figure out how to just provide for her son.

LAURA FLANDERS: And Chris' wife and kid, what's the status of that family? And I should say, do you think the sentence for 12 years was right? Should he be freed? Has he served enough time? What do you make of all that?

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah, that's a great question. For Chris, who has been sentenced to 12 years, you know, particularly if you have a perspective of the American criminal justice system as a system that is not designed in a way to really foster any real meaningful rehabilitation and restoration. It's a system I think that we need to sort of scrap and rethink, because it's not doing what we say that it's what we wanted to do. I think from that perspective, you know, 12 years is an insane sentence that feels disproportionate to what he did on that day. He should be held accountable. There should be ways for him to sort of address what he did and come to grips with it, but to be away from his son for the next, you know, 12 years seems just disproportionate and not unnecessary completely.

LAURA FLANDERS: And his wife?

MICHAEL PREMO: And his wife. His wife, at his sentencing, Chris told me, messaged me from the DC jail, and said that his wife had asked for a divorce.

LAURA FLANDERS: Well, we'll leave that story there. Maybe there's a follow-up to come. I look forward to anything that you go ahead to make. Michael, I'd love to hear what your next project is. And I'll ask you the question we ask everybody in this show, which is, you know, what do you think is the story that the future will tell of this moment? You started by saying that you were actually still quite afraid.

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah. I mean, I think, you know, seeing there was people, the amazing glowing examples of humanity after disaster, like the fires in California at the moment, always give me moments of hope. But I think that, people, you know, 10, 15, 20 years from now, will look at this moment as a turning point in American democracy, when some of the sort of the infrastructure of reason that buttresses the system of democracy was chiseled away in a really significant way. I think we're turning a corner, and democracy in America is going to look very different in the next century.

LAURA FLANDERS: Michael Premo, thank you so much with Rachel Falcone for the extraordinary documentary "Homegrown". We'll have much more information about it at our website, and I thank you so much for being with us. I really appreciate this conversation.

MICHAEL PREMO: Thanks for having me on.

NARRATOR: Thanks for taking the time to listen to the full conversation from our episode "Inside the MAGA Movement: What Happens Now?" with guest Michael Premo, a journalist and filmmaker who produced and directed the gripping documentary "Homegrown". The film follows three members of the Proud Boys in the lead up to the January 6th insurrection. These audio exclusives are made possible thanks to our member supporters. Please join our members now by making a one time donation or make it monthly. All the details are at lauraflanders.org. And thanks again to all of our member supporters.